

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Cougar extinct

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Few animals get people as excited as cougars, and perhaps with good reason –they're big, charismatic, carnivores, and in the Eastern United States, exceptionally rare.

There are numerous subspecies of cougars across the Americas, and earlier this spring the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service released a report declaring the Eastern cougar, the one once found across much of the Eastern United States, extinct. The Service still recognizes the existence of the endangered, and smaller, Florida panther.

During the review, the Service received 573 responses to a request for scientific information about the possible existence of the eastern cougar subspecies; the conducted an extensive review of U.S. and Canadian scientific literature; and they requested information from the 21 states within the historical range of the subspecies. No states expressed a belief in the existence of an eastern cougar population.

The Service has frequently received reports of cougars from across the eastern U.S., however, cougars that have been successfully identified have turned out to be a South American subspecies, that had escaped or been released to the wild, or a western cougar that was released or had migrated eastward to the Midwest. And it may well be that an occasional cougar still gets dumped here in the mountains – in 2006 we saw an alligator that had been dumped in the French Broad River, and just last year downtown Atlanta saw a zebra wandering around that had escaped from the circus.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.